

Jennifer Rowe

Testimony in Favor of House Bill 394

Dear Delegate Pena-Melnyk and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

My name is Jennifer Rowe. As a resident of Maryland and a person with a disability, I am writing to support House Bill 394.

From 2016 to 2019, I was a member of Krav Maga Maryland, a self-defense school in Columbia. In 2019, my membership was cancelled in retaliation for complaining about discrimination I had experienced there. I immediately reported the incident to the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights in the hope of holding the school accountable.

Unfortunately, my experience with the Commission was deeply disappointing. First, the intake supervisor incorrectly stated that the Commission did not handle retaliation claims and required me to remove that part of my complaint. Second, although the regulations require a conference that includes both sides, the investigator met with the school and its legal counsel before meeting with me. By the time I met with him, he seemed to have already accepted the school's version of events. I expressed concern about bias, and he responded by becoming defensive, accusing me of mistreating him, and abruptly ending the meeting.

Approximately eight months later, I learned that the Commission had found no probable cause to believe that discrimination had occurred. I submitted a Request for Reconsideration, which was denied without explanation. Then I filed a petition for judicial review. Unfortunately, the circuit court did not seriously consider my position; it upheld the finding with very little analysis. I appealed, but both the appellate court and the state supreme court ruled that jurisdiction ends at the circuit court. Out of options, I was left with a sense of injustice and second-class citizenship, as well as deep concern for other marginalized and vulnerable residents.

Therefore, I urge the committee to support House Bill 394. Thank you for hearing my concerns.